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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PRESS AGREES WITH CHANGES TO
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AMENDMENT; NO TO ELECTION MONITORS:
EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES, JUNE 12 TO 18

1. Summary: Opposition press eagerly engaged in the debate over changes made by Parliament to the constitutional amendment on Egypt's presidential elections law changes that they perceived would exclude Gamal Mubarak from running for the presidency. However, one commentator in leading pro-government daily Al Ahram remained unimpressed by Egypt's reforms, comparing Egypt unfavorably to Syria. Most commentators continued to reject international election observers, while several reacted to recent violence in Iraq, with large-circulation pro-government daily Al Akhbar claiming that Zarqawi "must be an American agent." End summary.

2. Gamal thwarted?: The opposition press expressed satisfaction with Parliament for having made two amendments to Egypt's presidential election law: 1) a presidential candidate must not be a dual national and 2) a candidate must have completed his military service. Leading anti-government critic opposition Al Wafd (circulation: 180,000) praised the amendments in its June 16 edition. Previous to June 16, Al Wafd attacked Parliament for considering the possibility of not amending these two items. Most papers agree that Gamal Mubarak did not serve in the military; however, the independent daily Al Masri Al Youm (circulation: 20,000) reported that Gamal had served in the Republican Guard. Meanwhile, a report in independent weekly Al Dostour (circulation: 50,000) on June 15 demanded that Gamal Mubarak reveal whether or not he carries British citizenship. In criticism aimed at the government's reform efforts, a June 16 commentary in pro-government Al Ahram (circulation: 750,000) compared Syria's "old guard" to Egypt's ruling NDP: "The only difference (between Egypt and Syria) is the speed of any so-called change. In the end, the objective in both countries is keeping one party rule."

3. Election monitors in Egypt: While TV and the print press reported on the third round of Lebanese parliamentary elections, Egyptian commentators were quiet on the results. Instead, commentators devoted their attention to Egypt's elections and the issue of international election monitors for the most part, rejecting monitors. A guest on Channel One's "Halet Hiwar" ("State of Discussion") on June 16 declared, "Egyptians refuse any foreign intervention in our elections." On June 18 all newspapers reported on the claim by the Sheikh of Al-Azhar that elections in Egypt "should not be monitored by any foreign agency unless the Egyptian government permits it." The June 18 weekend edition of pro-government Al Akhbar, Akhbar Al Youm (circulation: 1,000,000), reported that leading intellectuals and opposition party officials "reject international supervision of elections in Egypt." However, a reformist commentator welcomed international observers in Al Ahram on June 18, writing, "This issue has nothing to do with national sovereignty. Since Egypt claims that its elections will be fair and free, having observers would improve Egypt's image abroad and affirm its leading role in the Arab world."

4. Iraq: The Egyptian press and commentators returned to the well-worn theme of criticizing USG policy in Iraq. (Comment: TV and print media coverage seemed to focus on the violence in Iraq more than at any other time during the past few months. End comment.) A June 17 unsigned editorial in Al Ahram criticized what it termed the "alleged democracy and freedom in Iraq," claiming that the "chaos" and violence in Iraq was "due to the presence of U.S. occupation troops." Pro-government Al Akhbar (circulation: 800,000) went as far as to claim in an unsigned editorial on June 15, "Zarqawi m